



The Healthy Schools Summit:

Commitment to Change

Healthy schools, those that support good nutrition and physical activity as part of a total learning environment, produce healthy students. Healthy students are better able to develop and learn. Healthy students who achieve their educational potential form healthy communities. Healthy communities build a healthy America.

The underlying premise of the **Healthy Schools Summit** is that all schools in America should provide a healthy environment where children learn and participate in positive dietary and lifestyle behaviors and practices. By facilitating learning through the support and promotion of good nutrition and physical activity, schools contribute to the basic health status of children, thereby optimizing their performance potential, and ensuring that no child is left behind. For many schools, to provide a healthy environment requires significant change. Therefore, it is essential to form public-private partnerships among the various parties who influence the school environment and curriculum, and those who can influence the adoption of policies and practices that support healthier lifestyles as outlined in a number of recent reports, including:

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, December 2001;
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/CalltoAction.pdf>;
2. U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Foods Sold in Competition with School Meal Programs: A Report to Congress*. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, August 2001;
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/CompetitiveFoods/competitive.foods.report.to.congress.htm>;
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment*. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, August 2000;
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating*. MMWR 1996;45 (No. RR-9): 1-41;
<ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Publications/mmwr/rr/rr4509.pdf>;
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People*. MMWR 1997;46 (No. RR-6): 1-36; <ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Publications/mmwr/rr/rr4606.pdf>;
6. American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dietetic Association, National Hispanic Medical Association, National Medical Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Healthy School Nutrition Environments: Promoting Healthy Eating Behaviors*. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, August 2001;
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/HealthyEating/HealthyEatingBehavior/healthyeatingchallenge.htm>;

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7. National Association of State Boards of Education. *Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide (Part 1. Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and Tobacco-Use Prevention)*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, March 2000;
8. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. *Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports: Report to the President*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2000; <http://www.cdc.gov/nccddphp/dash/presphysactrpt/download.htm>; and,
9. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000. <http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/document/tableofcontents.htm>.

These reports are clear: obesity is at an epidemic level in America. Childhood obesity and overweight are on the rise, while diet quality is poor and physical activity levels are insufficient. These factors compromise children's ability to achieve their full educational potential. To underscore further the effect of obesity on Americans and America, the Surgeon General has reported that unhealthy dietary habits and sedentary behavior together account for over 300,000 DEATHS and \$100 BILLION in costs annually.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity declares a need for widespread support to develop solutions to one of the nation's most dire and burdensome public health issues. Solutions need to be collaborative, vigorous and sustainable.

The **Healthy Schools Summit** represents such a collaboration with support and participation from diverse sectors of government, education, health and nutrition, business and industry, and community. The Summit collaborators recognize the critical need to improve children's overall health and to manage obesity and overweight. To achieve this, we must reach children when and where they are most educable. In a healthy school environment, dietary behavior and patterns can be shaped, physical activity can be encouraged and positive habits can be formed. To that end, the **Healthy Schools Summit** collaborators also recognize the following:

- A. Schools provide a total learning environment for developing and practicing lifelong behaviors.

The entire school environment, not just the classroom, should be aligned with healthy school goals to positively influence a child's understanding, beliefs and habits as they relate to good nutrition and regular physical activity. A healthy school environment should not be dependent on revenue from high-fat, low-nutrient foods to support school programs.

- B. Poor dietary habits diminish nutrient quality and thereby contribute to sub-optimal health status and performance.

All foods available before, during or after school should meet the USDA nutrition standards in a manner that appeals to children and promotes an increase in school meal participation, including breakfast, lunch, after-school snacks and meals, and summer feeding. Emphasis should be placed on foods that naturally contain nutrients that are typically missing from children's diets. Foods should be served with consideration toward

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safety, handling, packaging, taste and appeal to ensure high quality meals that optimize nutrient density per calorie in a cost-efficient manner.

- C. The amount of time children are engaged in physical activity continues to decrease. *Physical activity should be included in a school's daily education program from grades pre-K through 12. Physical activity should include regular instructional physical education, co-curricular activities and recess. It is not appropriate to substitute any one of these components for the others and the physical education program is an essential basis for all students to learn about and participate in physical activity.*
- D. There is a national imperative to improve academic performance and close gaps among ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Educators, administrators, regulators, health practitioners and communities must all acknowledge the critical role children's health plays in academic stamina and performance and adapt the school environment to ensure students' basic nourishment and activity needs are met. Research highlighting the positive relationship between good nutrition, physical activity and the capacity of children to develop and learn should be highlighted to ensure widespread understanding of the benefits to healthy school environments. The diversity of the student population should be considered at all times to ensure that all children's needs — including those at highest risk for obesity related health problems — are attended.

The Healthy Schools Summit collaborators, individually and together, recognize their role in supporting the development of children into academically sound, productive, physically fit and well-nourished members of society. Integral to meeting this responsibility is a healthy school environment. This “Commitment to Change” document, adapted from the Surgeon General’s Call to Action, outlines the specific actions (below) needed to create a healthy school environment, and provides guidance for Summit collaborators and others to begin to take action. While no one collaborator can independently achieve all of the Actions outlined in this document, we can achieve much of it by working together.

Communication

- Build awareness among education and health leaders, administrators, teachers, food-service staff, coaches, nurses and other school staff as well as community and business leaders and the media about the contribution of proper nutrition and physical activity to the maintenance of lifelong healthy weight.
- Educate education leaders, administrators, teachers, staff, and parents about the importance of school physical education and nutrition programs and policies.
- Motivate education leaders, administrators, teachers and other school staff to take action toward a healthy school environment based on research linking good nutrition and physical activity with academic performance.
- Educate parents, teachers, coaches, staff and other adults in the community about the importance they hold as role models for children, and teach them how to be models for healthy eating and regular physical activity.
- Educate students, teachers, staff and parents about the importance of body size acceptance and the dangers of unhealthy weight control practices.

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- Develop sensitivity of staff to the problems encountered by the overweight child.

Action

1. Provide age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instruction in health education and physical education that help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors to adopt, maintain and enjoy healthy eating habits and a physically active lifestyle.
2. Provide students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 with behavior-focused nutrition education integrated into the curriculum that is interactive and teaches the skills they need to adopt healthy eating habits.*
3. Ensure that meals offered through all school feeding programs meet federal nutrition standards.
4. Adopt policies ensuring that all foods and beverages available on school campuses and at school events contribute toward eating patterns that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
5. Provide food options that are low in fat, calories and added sugars, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat dairy foods.
6. Ensure that healthy snacks and foods are provided in vending machines, school stores and other venues within the school's control.
7. Prohibit student access to vending machines, school stores, and other venues that contain foods of minimal nutritional value and compete with healthy school meals in elementary schools and restrict access in middle, junior and high schools.
8. Provide an adequate amount of time for students to eat school meals, and schedule lunch periods at reasonable hours around midday.
9. Provide all children, from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, with quality daily physical education that helps develop the knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors and confidence needed to be physically active for life.
10. Provide daily recess periods for elementary school students, featuring time for unstructured but supervised active play.
11. Provide adequate co-curricular physical activity programs, including fully inclusive intra-mural programs and physical activity clubs.
12. Encourage the use of school facilities for physical activity programs offered by the school and/or community-based organizations outside of school hours.

Based on U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. Rockville, Md.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2001.

* Excerpted from U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment*. Alexandria, Va.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, August 2000.

This Commitment to Change is the guiding document for the 2002 **Healthy Schools Summit: Taking Action for Children's Nutrition & Fitness**. For more information on the Summit and the leading children's health and education organizations that are collaborating on this initiative, please visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.